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Colonial Scholars and Anti-Colonial Agents: Politics of Academic Knowledge Production Between the West Indies and London in the Mid-20th Century

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Abstract

This paper analyses the socio-spatial entanglement of West Indian anti-colonial knowledge production in the mid-20th century existing *between* London and the Caribbean. This is interpreted as a case of the paradoxical politics of academic knowledge production in that British imperial policies that were constraining knowledge production in the West Indies were also seen as facilitating anti-colonial awareness and work in London by West Indian actors. Research demonstrating the importance of the metropole as a meeting place for global anti-colonial actors is complemented by shifting the focus to the entangled space *between* London and the West Indies. This article comparatively analyses the academic politics of the British Colonial Office – a spatial dislocation of knowledge production away from the West Indies – and its perception and challenge by Caribbean intellectuals who were temporarily based in London. The analysis builds on contributions by C.L.R. James and S. Wynter and their reflections on the institutionalisation of research in the West Indies and their experiences in London. Overall, I emphasise a relational and symmetrising analysis of knowledge production in imperial contexts that accounts for the entanglement of imperial politics in the metropole and the colonies, and the perception and potential use of these political entanglements by actors in and from colonial contexts.

INTRODUCTION

> At that time most of us West Indians lived in London, which was for long one of the great centres of imperialism. But being one of the great centres of imperialism, it follows that now it is one of the great

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> centres of the passing of colonialism. […] We thus get a total view of the whole movement which it is difficult to get elsewhere.
>
> (C. L. R. James, 1958, in Georgetown, Guyana)

London was the place of global anti-colonial efforts in the mid-20th century, as observed by one of the central figures of West Indian emancipation and anti-colonial thought, C.L.R. James. This paper's starting point is to interrogate the role of the socio-spatial dimension of knowledge production in the imperial context, especially the mobility of leading anti-colonial West Indian intellectuals towards the British metropole in the mid-20th century. At the time, the British Colonial Office prevented the establishment of a local academic institution of research and higher education in the West Indies. Instead, it aimed to educate loyal imperial subjects in the metropole and implemented mobility schemes for a few elite individuals. Within this context, Caribbean intellectuals travelled to the metropole, which then became a central location for the anti-colonial movement.

Recent contributions have analysed the crucial role London played for the anti-colonial movement, both for the West Indies and worldwide; building on this, this paper focuses on the interaction of West Indian anti-colonial knowledge production with the imperial politics of knowledge production *in* the West Indies. Therefore, I interrogate how the spatial dislocation of knowledge production away from the West Indies influenced the experiences and work of Caribbean intellectuals in London. Thus, the focus is shifted from the metropole to the entangled space *between* London and the West Indies. Instead of starting from the point at which Caribbean intellectuals were already in London, I analyse their reflections on their circular mobility between metropole and colony, and its epistemic impact.

The Caribbean – a space of rigorous anti-colonial knowledge production, relatively recent political emancipation, and genuinely *transnational* political and academic engagement – serves as a case study through which I will focus on the experiences and work of two scholars in this anti-colonial context. Contributions by C.L.R. James and S. Wynter will be examined with regard to how they perceived and observed the interrelation of their mobility to London, the missing institutionalisation in the West Indies, and their knowledge production. Overall, the case will be described as an instance of the paradoxical politics of academic knowledge production, as the same British imperial institutions constraining knowledge production in the West Indies were also seen as facilitating anti-colonial awareness and work by West Indian actors themselves.[1]

The following subsections provide an overview of the literature on the geopolitics of knowledge production, with a primary focus on mobility in imperial contexts, and introduce the case study, methodology and empirical material employed. Subsequently, in the second section, I will elaborate on the imperial politics of knowledge production as promoted by the British Colonial Office in the West Indies and their negotiation by West Indian independence leaders, as well as examining the examples of anti-colonial intervention from C.L.R. James in both London and the West Indies. The third section focuses on the reflections of Cuban-Jamaican scholar S. Wynter on knowledge production in the West Indies, the role she ascribes to the imperial institutions and her personal experiences of studying in London as a colonial citizen. Finally, I will offer general concluding remarks on understanding socio-spatially situated knowledge production in imperial contexts.

The geopolitics of knowledge and mobilities within

On a global level, the mobility of social scientists from and in the Global South towards the metropole represents an often-discussed feature of post-colonial *academic dependency* in which the dominant role of former colonial metropoles in knowledge production is reproduced (Alatas, 2003; Hountondji, 1990).[2] The imperial politics of knowledge production in which institutionalisations of research and higher education were prohibited (e.g. *in* the West Indies) contributed to a geopolitical order in which colonial metropoles were and remain privileged. Nowadays, the increasing expectation that scholars will move internationally and mainly towards institutions in the

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Global North can be seen as a colonial legacy based on these spatial politics and a higher valorisation of knowledge production in Northern metropoles (Connell & Wood, 2002, p. 169; Rodríguez Medina, 2014; Connell et al., 2017, 2018; Castiello and Lee, 2018; for the geopolitics of knowledge production, see Livingstone, 2003; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). Against this broad macro-perspective, historical studies of academic migration towards the Global North displayed how mobile anti-colonial actors also challenged this geopolitical order.

Addressing the institutional factors, T. Pietsch demonstrates how "the social and institutional practices of British and settler English-speaking universities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century" (Pietsch, 2013, p. 8) were a tool of imperial rule; however, scholars were also pivotal in challenging "forms of scientific racism that supported imperial rule"[3] (Pietsch, 2013, p. 8). Researching US-American philanthropic foundations, which promoted academic exchange and migration, and their influence on US Foreign Policy since the 1930s, I. Parmar shows how these institutions "have been a key means of building [...] an American imperium" (Parmar, 2014, p. 2; on scholarships, Tournès and Scott-Smith, 2018). In his historical study of activists from the Global South in interwar Paris, M. Goebel examines the everyday practices of activists and intellectuals as they worked against colonial rule, providing insights into the migration practices and anti-colonial knowledge production of the time. He highlights that it was "through contact, networks, and connectivity that later Third World nationalists dreamed up a post-imperial world order" (Goebel, 2015, p. 3). By interrogating how networks in Paris functioned as a *contact zone* for activists worldwide, he entwines the social history of migration and the intellectual history of anti-imperialism. Similarly, P. Gopal presents an illuminating study of anti-colonial action in the British metropole from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century by looking "at the relationship between British critics of empire and the great movements of resistance to British rule which emerged across colonial contexts" (Gopal, 2019, p. IX).[4]

Informed by these accounts of migration towards and anti-colonial action within imperial metropoles, this paper looks at the interrelation of the academic politics of individual mobility enacted by the British Colonial Office, the institutionalisation of knowledge production spatially located *in* the West Indies and the transatlantic engagement of West Indian scholars in London and the Caribbean.

The case of West Indian knowledge production

Besides being an often-overlooked region, only occasionally considered in the works discussed, what makes the case of the Caribbean in the mid-20th century especially interesting is the late institutionalisation of knowledge production *in* the West Indies in the context of a simultaneous history of globally influential and vital intellectual thought. The British politics of academic knowledge production must be taken into account in order to understand both the mobility of Caribbean intellectuals towards London and the return of many intellectuals to the West Indies following the independency of the states and the establishment of the local University of the West Indies as a sovereign institution. Transnationality was crucial both in London, which served as a meeting space where solidarity between Caribbean students from different territories was cultivated, and for the University of the West Indies, which became a core regional institution of the transnational West Indian Federation through which independency was sought.

Caribbean social scientists have worked extensively on colonial legacies in knowledge production. Contributions in the humanities influenced the global discourse of anti-colonial thought in the 1940s and from the 1990s onwards (Césaire, 1950; Fanon, 1986; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 2002; James, 1938), and social scientists elaborated on the importance of the colonial plantation system for Caribbean societies as well as the challenges of Caribbean knowledge production (Henry, 2000; Sankatsing, 2001; Bogues, 2003; Best & Levitt, 2009; Girvan, 2010; L. R. Gordon, 2014; Reddock, 2014; J. A. Gordon et al., 2016; Kamugisha, 2019; Gutiérrez Rodríguez & Reddock, 2021; L. F. Lewis, 2021).

I argue that the historical case of West Indian intellectuals in the mid-20th century illustrates how British imperial academic institutions intended to educate loyal imperial subjects in the metropole were simultaneously

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perceived by West Indian scholars as facilitating their anti-colonialism. In their reflections on knowledge production in London and the West Indies, these scholars ascribe the imperial institutions that spatially dislocated research and higher education to London a central role in their anti-colonial work.

Methodologically, I draw on a comparison of the viewpoints of the Colonial Office and the West Indian intellectuals, inspired by the relational concept of 'global entanglements' developed by social theorist S. Randeria (Conrad & Randeria, 2002). This "relational perspective puts the emphasis on the constitutive role that the interaction between Europe and the non-European world has played for the specificity of modernity in the respective societies" (translation by the author; Conrad & Randeria, 2002, p. 40) and "analyse[s] contemporary societies on a geopolitical scale and in historical perspective" (Gutiérrez Rodríguez & Reddock, 2021, p. 2f.; see also Conrad & Randeria, 2002; Boatcă & Costa, 2010, p. 27).

To understand the entangled history of West Indian knowledge production in the mid-20th century via a comparison of viewpoints, I examine different document sources in addition to secondary historical literature. The analysis is based on a report on higher education policies produced on behalf of the British Colonial Office, together with publications by James and Wynter and an existing autobiographical interview conducted by David Scott.

Over the course of 16 years, US-Caribbean anthropologist D. Scott conducted eleven "long, detailed interviews with Caribbean writers, scholars and political actors whose work and working lives have been formative in the making of the postindependence Anglophone Caribbean" and analysed the "*temporal* experiences" of these intellectuals from different generations (Scott, 2014, p. 157). As these interviews were conducted with a very open structure and have been extensively published, I will draw on the interview with S. Wynter, who studied in London in the 1950s.

While these interviews, together with the vast literature on the intellectual history of the West Indies,[5] already represent an extensive body of work on the history of radical Caribbean thought, this paper expands this work by focussing on its *spatial* dimension and investigating the mutual influence of institutional and individual practices in the space *between* the West Indies and London on Caribbean knowledge production.

THE (DIS)LOCATION OF WEST INDIAN KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND HIGHER EDUCATION TO LONDON AND THE ANTI-COLONIALISM EXISTING THERE

The institutionalisation of knowledge production *in* the anglophone Caribbean was held back until the mid-20th century, as local research and higher education were only institutionalised in the 1950s, together with the sovereignty of the formerly British West Indian colonies during the 1960s (see G.K. Lewis, 1985, p. 211). The educational system served for a long time to instruct loyal imperial citizens, and higher education was only possible through mobility to the colonial metropole (however, for the rich tradition of social thought in the West Indies before its institutionalization in the mid-20th century, see G.K. Lewis, 1983; Henry, 2000; Bogues, 2003; Benn, 2004; see also Cramer, 2022).

The academic politics of the British Colonial Office until the interwar period can be described as spatial politics of distancing, in that Caribbean knowledge production was dislocated to the metropole. Encouraging individual mobility to the metropole based on scholarships instead of establishing local institutions was intertwined with an epistemically imperial standpoint in social research (Mintz, 1974, p. 45; Trouillot, 1992, p. 20; Connell, 1997, p. 1516f.). However, after the interwar period, there was a re-configuration of the spatial order that accompanied the temporal dynamics of accelerated political action and a re-location of higher education.

Only from the 1870s onwards, when the West Indies were granted Crown colony status, did the British Colonial Office attempt the instalment of mass education. The school system subsequently introduced was meant to educate colonial subjects devoted to the British Empire (Bacchus, 2009, p. 308). As in most other non-settler colonies, institutions of higher education were not established in the Caribbean territories, except for religious

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colleges (Cobley, 2000, p. 2; for the following, see Bacchus, 2009, p. 242f.; 319ff.; Taylor, 1951; Braithwaite, 1958; Whitehead, 2005; Marshall, 2000).

During this period, religious and political leaders had already promoted the idea of a local university. However, since the British Colonial Office did not stipulate any funding or a coordinated policy for higher education in the West Indies, each British Caribbean territory was left to engage its own separate schemes (Cobley, 2000, p. 5; see Bacchus, 2009, p. 244ff.).

Based on a Bishop's proposal, in 1876 the Barbadian government implemented a scholarship programme which enabled students to study at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which was soon replicated by the governments of Jamaica and Trinidad. Scholarships to study at Codrington College, a local Anglican theological college, were also offered but less valued than opportunities to study in England (Braithwaite, 1958, p. 8). These Island Scholarships allowed "at first exclusively male, and almost all white" (Cobley, 2000, p. 5) students to pursue higher education in Great Britain, and "increased educational mobility" (Braithwaite, 1965, p. 77) was generated as a result. At the same time, the higher status of British educational institutions was implied and "efforts of local institutions to offer quality education" were belittled (Cobley, 2000, p. 5). In the words of later Campus Principal L. Braithwaite, "One effect of this arrangement was to tie the educational system of these colonies, at all levels, to a foreign rather than indigenous culture" (Braithwaite, 1965, p. 77). An institutional divide was established between the British metropole and its colony, constructing two separate social contexts.

During the interwar period, the position of British officials towards the institutionalisation of higher education in the colony profoundly changed. Now, the mobility of students towards London was seen as a political threat by British officials, and efforts were made to establish higher education institutions *in* the West Indies (and in colonies across the Empire). In the 1930s and 1940s, marked by growing nationalist and anti-colonial movements worldwide and unrest in the West Indies, an acceleration of imperial policy-making occurred that could be interpreted as a rapid shift from colonial to neocolonial politics within the realm of institutionalised academic knowledge production.

After World War I, British colonial policies were generally standardised to secure imperial unity, and, therefore, the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA), located in Trinidad, was founded in 1921, and a committee on Education in the Colonies was established in 1923 (Colonial Office, 1945; see Braithwaite, 1958, p. 26ff, 37; Cobley, 2000, p. 6). In addition to concerns regarding the training of local personnel in the colonies and increasing conflict around the racist climate and discriminatory policies in Britain, officials feared the "growing political consciousness among the rising elites in the colonies" (Cobley, 2000, p. 7) as well as the radicalisation of students from West Africa and the Caribbean finding anti-colonial inspiration during their stays in the colonial metropole.

Therefore, while moving to the metropole was formerly seen as an instrument of intellectual influence and training devoted to imperial loyalty, education in the metropole was now perceived as an anti-colonial threat.

The so-called Asquith Commission was quickly founded in 1943 to evaluate the potential for higher education institutions in the British colonies, and a committee, led by Sir J. Irvine, principal and vice-chancellor of the University of St. Andrews, left in 1944 for the West Indies, the US, and Canada on a mission to survey the possibility of establishing a university in the West Indies (Cobley, 2000, p. 11). In their final report, published in 1945 – the same year the fifth Pan-African Congress took place in Manchester, which played a pivotal role in the global anti-colonial movement – the committee formulated

> a firm recommendation that a university should be provided in the West Indies at the earliest possible date. Indeed, throughout its [the Committee's MC] report repeated emphasis is laid on the necessity for swift action.
>
> (Colonial Office, 1945, p. 94)

The report further elaborates on details of a regional university founded in 1948 in Jamaica as the University College of the West Indies (UCWI), financed by the Colonial Development fund. Like other universities established

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in British colonies based on recommendations of the Asquith Commission, the UCWI depended on the University of London, which awarded the degrees and made decisions about the college's curricula, staffing etc. (Colonial Office, 1945, p. 95ff.; Taylor, 1951, p. 9; see Cobley, 2000, p. 14). Caribbean social scientist C. Thomas highlights that the UCWI was designed to create "local elites" that keep "the 'people in check'" and thus educate 'imperial citizens' who are dedicated to the Empire in a bid to control the spread of anti-colonial movements (Thomas, 2001, p. 726).

Therefore, in this period of changing imperial dynamics, the UCWI and other colonial universities represented an attempt at institutional continuity through which British influence was intended to be secured.[6]

However, by promoting a regional identity, the UCWI also served the interests of West Indian anti-colonial politicians who were "on the verge of organising the final push for independence" (Thomas, 2001, p. 726). Amongst others, Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, who saw a regional federation as the pathway towards independence, argued strongly for an institutional merger of the ICTA and UCWI to strengthen ties between Jamaica and Trinidad and thereby build up a regional identity (Williams, 1950, p. 107; see Cobley, 2000, p. 14f). The UCWI and ICTA were formally united in 1960 to become a transnational university and a prominent regional institution that continued through the break-up of the West Indian Federation in 1962. This institution is often seen as a prominent symbol of working regionalism that helped to enable the Caribbean independence movements to achieve sovereignty for various nation-states (see Thomas, 2001, p. 730).

The structural lack of institutionalised higher education and research opportunities *in* the British West Indies during the mid-20th Century and provision of individual academic mobility programmes to the metropole can be described as the imperial politics of *spatial dislocation*, in that higher education and knowledge production in the socio-spatial context of the West Indies itself was renounced. Within this political context of knowledge production, however, West Indian scholars in London engaged in the global anti-colonial movement and, through their efforts, supported the institutionalisation of research and higher education *in* the Caribbean, thereby undermining the imperial intention of educating imperial subjects via dislocation to London.

Anti-colonialism in the metropole

The institutionalisation of higher education and research *in* the West Indies was entangled with the anti-colonial thought and activism of West Indian intellectuals in London who organised and met with other global anti-colonial activists in the British metropole. Their activities triggered the British Colonial Office's decision to establish a local university in the Caribbean instead of continuing the elite model of metropolitan education based on scholarships. In the following section, a short overview of this intellectual network will be followed by the illustrative example of C.L.R James, an outstanding West Indian anti-colonial thinker and activist, and his contemporary reflections on the role of London as a *meeting place* for anti-colonial intellectuals.

In London in the mid-20th century, a network of radical West Indian scholars emerged and produced innovative "counter-narratives of 'postcolonial' and 'anti-colonial' thought" (Reddock, 2014, p. 493f.). This group of radical Caribbean thinkers was highly influenced by what Trinidadian sociologist R. Reddock describes as "transnational linkages with other diasporic communities, the metropolitan intelligentsia including anti-colonial activists, as well as local or national intellectuals and movements" (Reddock, 2014, p. 496). As Reddock highlights in her work on this group, they were exposed "to a sound colonial education, at least to high school level", and therefore knew the colonial language, and "gr[ew] up in a racialized, colonial socioeconomic milieu where colour and phenotype were important markers of status but with strong traditions of political or labour activism", all spending "much of their adult life in the USA and/or Britain" (Reddock, 2014, p. 498; see also Pierre, 2008, p. 150). They "represent a small early Black intelligentsia" only "one or two generations out of slavery" (Reddock, 2014, p. 498; see also Robinson, 2000, p. 182ff.).

The influential *International African Service Bureau* was a central institution for these radical West Indian thinkers in London. Run together with pan-African scholars and activists, the Bureau notably shaped the

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organisation of the Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945, which trailblazed the global decolonisation movement (see Bogues, 2003, p. 72; Høgsbjerg, 2014; Gopal, 2019, pp. 360, 385ff.). The Bureau's institutionalisation was not only entwined with activists based in the US but also globally with "the labour rebellions that shook the British West Indies from the 1930s onwards [...] and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (later Ethiopia)" (Gopal, 2019, p. 320f.).

These intellectuals positioned "themselves as both colonial and British in their London base", fertilising the dialogue surrounding labour, capitalism, race, culture and anti-colonialism, and they are seen as a remarkable example of global knowledge production (Gopal, 2019, p. 322f.). Besides scholarly and journalistic writing and activism, they were engaged in artistic and literary production (see Reddock, 2014, p. 506), and it has been argued that their shared biographical experiences affected their anti-colonial work and "[a[fter their time [in London, MC] and because of their work, decolonization and Black liberation would return to their native lands" (Robinson, 2000, p. 262; see also Henry & Buhle, 1992, p. 112; Hammer, 2017).

C.L.R. James: London as a meeting place for anti-colonial actors

In this context, the scholar and activist C.L.R. James stands out as a central figure of anti-colonial organisation and thought in London, and he attributed the city a crucial role in his anti-colonial work as a *meeting place* for various anti-colonial actors. His reflections on the interrelation of knowledge production and the spatial politics of dislocation will be analysed in order to understand the perceptions among West Indian anti-colonial intellectuals of the imperial politics of knowledge production (Gopal, 2019, p. 360ff, 385ff.; Høgsbjerg, 2014; L. James, 2015, p. 69ff.; Matera, 2015, p. 73ff.; Reddock, 2014; Robinson, 2000, p. 255ff.; Pennybacker, 2009, p. 74ff.; Schwarz, 2018, p. 132ff.).

Born in 1901 in Trinidad, where he pursued secondary education financed by a scholarship, James worked as a teacher in the 1920s before leaving for England in 1932 to work as a journalist, writing specifically about cricket. By then, he had already finished the book manuscript of *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, his "first effort to analyse history and politics through biography" and had assumed a position in favour of Trinidadian self-rule (Brereton, 2014, p. 2; see also Henry & Buhle, 1992, p. 263). The manuscript was published as a short pamphlet in England entitled *The Case for West Indian Self-Government*, in 1933. He became active in the Pan-African movement in London by working for the International African Service Bureau, which he described as "the most striking West Indian creation between the wars" (C.L.R. James, 1938, p. 398), referencing the same period in which the British imperial politics of academic knowledge production rapidly shifted.

In terms of his academic work during this time, he further elaborated on the methodology he had pioneered in his piece on Cipriani in his famous work on the Haitian revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, published in 1938, which represented the foundation of a new tradition of Black Marxist thought (see Henry & Buhle, 1992, p. 124). In the preface, James outlines the epistemic effect of eurocentrism on historical studies,[7] further highlighting in an appendix how critical the Haitian revolution was for the self-observation of Caribbean people on an epistemological level: "West Indians first became aware of themselves as a people in the Haitian revolution" (C.L.R. James, 1938, p. 391). James further stresses the role of education and Pan-Africanism in decolonising knowledge from and about the Caribbean: "The West Indians were and had always been Western-educated. West Indian society confined black men to a very narrow strip of social territory. The first step to freedom was to go abroad. *Before they could begin to see themselves as a free and independent people they had to clear from minds the stigma that anything African was inherently inferior and degraded*" (C.L.R. James, 1938, p. 402; see also James et al., 2013). This passage emphasises how James considered mobility abroad (to Africa) and education that centres on the pan-African Caribbean as central to the development of the transnational Caribbean independence movement and anti-colonial intelligentsia.

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London as an essential meeting place was, James perceived, crucial for the regional West Indian consciousness and for anti-colonial work. In his *Lecture on Federation (West Indies and British Guiana)*, delivered in 1958 – the year the West Indies Federation was formed – at Queen's College in Guyana, James retrospectively outlined that he was invited to the inauguration of the Federal Parliament in Trinidad because

> the Federal Government and the Governor-General recognised the pioneer work that has been done by West Indians in London at a time when to advocate self-government was almost equivalent to treason. But what is treason in one period is often respectable twenty years afterwards […]. At that time most of us West Indians lived in London, which was for long one of the great centres of imperialism. But being one of the great centres of imperialism, it follows that now it is one of the great centres of the passing of colonialism. To London came and have come through the years a steady stream of colonials, newly emancipated, half-emancipated, demanding emancipation, about to be emancipated, all types. *We the West Indians in London meet them, discuss with them, take part in their political meetings and demonstrations. They take part in ours. We thus get a total view of the whole movement which it is difficult to get elsewhere. We are also in the political centre of Britain.* We are able to follow closely the actions (and reaction) of imperialism in its parliament and other state institutions, in its political parties, in its great organs of the Press and other means of communication. After a time we begin to understand better the attitudes of the British people themselves to imperialism and colonialism.
>
> We are not very far from Paris, another great centre of imperialism. We have more or less constant communication with colonials of the French Empire.
>
> Thus we are in a position to see the general trends of development, to mark the stages, to see each problem as part of a whole.
>
> (C.L.R. James, 1958; emphasis, MC)

From the perspective of C.L.R. James, as an actor situated spatially in London, the nearness of the imperial institutions and metropolitan public discourse was essential for the formation of the Caribbean anti-colonial movement, as was the possibility to network with other activists worldwide and also remain in touch with the French anti-colonial movement – therefore, establishing an inter-imperial exchange. By his account, being physically in London was a decisive factor for the Caribbean anti-colonial movement's work but not an absolutely necessary one; their encompassing view of the global anti-colonial movement might have been achieved – with difficulty – somewhere away from the metropole. However, James employs his experiences in London as a legitimation of his authority to speak about West Indian independence in Guyana. As the beginning of the passage highlights, London was also important since the advocation for independence in the colonies was perceived as treason; thus, in the Caribbean, it might not have been possible to pursue radical anti-colonialism as it was in London. For James, London as a *meeting place* enabled a regional consciousness that was critical for independence, precisely illustrating the fears of the British Colonial Office that London represented a facilitation of anti-colonial actors instead of a controllable place in which loyal imperial subjects were educated.

James' observations about the socio-spatial importance of London might be interpreted as describing a *meeting place*. Taking this concept, British social theorist and geographer D. Massey put forward that meeting places should be imagined as "open, porous, hybrid", with "particular articulations of […] social relations, including local relations 'within' the place and those many connections which stretch way beyond it. And all of these embedded in complex, layered, histories" (Massey, 1999, p. 41). Massey's concept, firstly, underlines the simultaneous social constructiveness of places and inherent material power structures, and, secondly, highlights the interrelation of places with others, in that places like London are never bound, isolated or enclosed but interconnected.

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Secondary literature on the history and intellectual tradition of anti-colonial West Indian intellectuals in London in the 1930s supports James' view of London as a meeting place for global anti-colonial activism. Historian M. Matera explicitly investigated the city's role as a meeting place (without reference to Massey) in his monograph 'Black London', in which he "examines the efforts of people of African descent to organize across colonial boundaries against racism and empire" and argues that "[t]he city provided the material conditions for organizing people of African descent into a transnational force in the making of a world after empire"[8] (Matera, 2015, p. 1; for more on the network of Black, anti-colonial intellectuals in London, see Makalani, 2011, p. 195ff.; Gopal, 2019; Høgsbjerg, 2014; Schwarz, 2018).

While these contributions illuminate the role of London in the global and West Indian anti-colonial movement, the knowledge production *in* the West Indies plays only a minor role. Referring to Massey, one could say that the global connections that stretched beyond London were neglected, not only those connections within the networks of anti-colonial intellectuals but also those with the imperial politics of knowledge production *in* the colonies. The quoted speech by James was given in Guyana, and during his travels to the West Indies, James also gave an influential speech at the newly founded University College of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica, in 1958. Therefore, it seems vital that the anti-colonial activities in London are seen within the context of the politics of knowledge production *in* the West Indies.

SYLVIA WYNTER: METROPOLITAN EXPERIENCES OF 'DISPLACEMENT' AND DECOLONIAL THOUGHT

Cuban-Jamaican writer and scholar S. Wynter, who studied at King's College London, from 1947 onwards, retrospectively considered her experiences in London and the imperial dislocation of knowledge production to have a formative impact on her decolonial work. Her reflections on the absence of institutionalised research and higher education in the West Indies and the role of mobility to London will be analysed in the following section to interrogate the perception among West Indian intellectuals of the imperial politics of knowledge production and its epistemic impact.

Wynter was born in 1928 in Cuba to Jamaican parents and moved to Jamaica at the age of two, where she went to high school, funded by a scholarship. Upon finishing school in 1946, she won the *Jamaica Centenary Scholarship for Girls*, which supported her higher education at King's College London, where she read Spanish, graduating in 1953. She held appointments in Spanish literature at the University of the West Indies, Mona, the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor, the University of California, San Diego, and Stanford University (Scott, 2000, p. 122).

Born 20 years later than James, as a student, she too experienced London as a space to connect transnationally after the Caribbean territories being isolated for decades by imperial educational policies. In an interview with D. Scott, Wynter remembers the centrality of an "emerging sense of West Indianness" during her study time in London and reflects on how this transnationality was

> very true, because, remember, in the different islands we had been totally cut off from each other. We weren't even taught Caribbean geography in the schools. The geography that was taught was that of England, the history that was taught was English history. […] London was the centre of empire and the British Empire was still very powerful. […] But it wasn't only about being West Indian. There were many Africans there, all of them struggling for independence, so there was a powerful pan-African sensibility. […] There was a ferment at that centre, because these are going to be the days that will see the climax of the definitive struggles against the British Empire.
>
> (Scott, 2000, p. 129, p. 129)

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By her account, British imperial education had thus promoted specific knowledge – or in this case, non-knowledge – about the Caribbean islands that would hold back the formation *in* the West Indies of a transnational collective self-understanding, resistance, and institutions.[9] This institutional context severely impacted the development of research and epistemes in the West Indies as taught knowledge was centred around England and excluded the Caribbean. Conversely, according to Wynter's description, solidarity was cultivated in London, not only amongst West Indians but also amongst African and Indian people. By her account, it was the pan-African awareness that bolstered the anti-colonial endeavour, displaying similarities to James' account of London as a transnational *meeting place* (Scott, 2000, p. 132; for her contribution to decolonial thought, see Wynter, 2003).

In addition to these epistemic exclusions and the transnational organisation, Wynter further describes in the interview how experiences of marginality and social exclusion during her time in London influenced her work.

> DS [David Scott]: So there is in the 1950s, for your generation in London, a very self-conscious concern to transform the imagination.
>
> SW [Silvia Wynter]: Very self-conscious. Certainly by the time I became a writer it becomes very self-conscious. Remember, going to England, or coming to the United States, what you run into is the overt nature of these stereotypes of yourself that confront you. It's like Fanon going to France […]. [I]n London […] you're just *one* thing, being and behaving, a n[]. So, you run into these stereotypes. They're all around you, part of unconscious way of thinking, and so it becomes imperative to confront these stereotypes. And I would say that the guiding thread that has lasted all through my work is, How do you deal with the stereotyped view of yourself that you yourself have been socialized to accept? […]
>
> DS: Do you think that there's a way in which that transformation of the imagination *depended* on that displacement in London?
>
> SW: That was very important. I've always felt a certain sympathy for students at the University of the West Indies because they don't experience that displacement. That displacement is very jolting because from that moment you can no longer coincide with yourself.
>
> (Scott, 2000, p. 131f.)

In this passage, Wynter explicitly reflects on how her decolonial work *depended* on her personal experiences of exclusion, confrontations with stereotypes about her identity, and displacement during her higher education in London; she thus retrospectively draws a direct connection between her move to the metropole and her decolonial work. Her reference to French-Martiniquan psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon (whom Wynter also builds upon in her academic work, see Wynter, 2003, p. 269ff.; see also L.F. Lewis, 2021, p. 136ff.) reflects the transnational awareness also in this account. Wynter elaborates on how these experiences of social exclusion initiated a reflection on her identity and informed her research. Pursuing higher education in London – at a time in which, as she highlights, no opportunity to study in the West Indies existed – profoundly impacted on her academic work. What becomes evident in this interview passage is the importance of the socio-spatial context surrounding knowledge production and the teaching of it; Wynter underlines how the 'displacement' she experienced during her studies in London – her individual and subjective experience of the imperial academic politics of spatial distancing – severely influenced her philosophical contributions. The study period in London profoundly changed her self-perception, a "jolting" experience directly linked to imperial academic politics. Wynter, one could say, productively theorised these exposures in her work, in which she critically engages with colonial thinking and knowledge production on an epistemological level and develops alternative versions of thinking that challenge the colonial hegemony (see L.F. Lewis, 2021, p. 136ff.).[10]

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has argued that West Indian anti-colonial knowledge production in the mid-20th century represents a case of the paradoxical politics of academic knowledge production, in the sense that the same British imperial institutions that were constraining knowledge production in the West Indies were also seen as facilitating anti-colonial awareness and work by West Indian actors. It maintains that the spatial entanglement between the metropole and its colonies – in this case, London and the West Indies – and the mobility connecting them assumes a pivotal role in the understanding of knowledge production in imperial contexts with regard to both imperial and anti-colonial actors. This paper examined the West Indian case as part of a global trend of activists and scholars from the colonies travelling to and organising against colonial rule in the metropoles during the early and mid-20th century.

This case demonstrates how the colonial education policy of mobility to the metropole for an elite group of scholars, rather than building an institution of higher education and research *in* the West Indies, installed an imperial order of knowledge production characterised by spatial dislocation. Therefore, (post-)colonial power structures were translated into distinct institutions that created inequalities in knowledge production. However, Caribbean intellectuals advancing anti-colonialism in the metropole attributed a core role to these institutions in facilitating their anti-colonial work, with C.L.R. James describing how London served as a meeting place for the anti-colonial movement alongside retrospective reflections by Sylvia Wynter. Wynter prominently outlined the crucial role of her experiences of 'displacement' in London for her decolonial work. In comparing the perspectives of the Colonial Office and Caribbean intellectuals, it can be seen how London concurrently represented the imperial metropole, from where the British Colonial Office governed the institutionalisation of knowledge production in the West Indies, and a meeting place for global anti-colonial actors. London, therefore, created opportunities for anti-colonial regional and transnational community-building and consciousness, which was, in the Caribbean case, a decisive step for the independence movement.

This analysis reveals the simultaneous interplay of imperial academic politics and anti-colonial work and practices on the level of institutional and epistemic orders. The formation of new Caribbean-centred research paradigms and a simultaneous spatial reconfiguration and institutionalisation of knowledge production and higher education *in* the West Indies shows how these two dimensions interact. Overall, this paper emphasises a relational and symmetrising analysis of knowledge production in imperial contexts that accounts for both imperial politics in the metropole and the colonies and the perception and potential use of these imperial politics by actors in and from colonial contexts.

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ENDNOTES

[1] In the following, I argue that the connection between West Indian intellectuals travelling to and living in London and their becoming of anti-colonial activists can be understood as a contingency and not a causality; I maintain that it is not an arbitrary coincidence that West Indian intellectuals were in London at the time and that many became anti-colonial agents.

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[2] This paper builds on arguments developed in an earlier publication about how Caribbean social scientists challenged academic dependency in the 1950s (Cramer, 2022).

[3] In a similar vein, in his critique of postcolonial studies and scholars in the 1980s, A. Dirlik outlines how the promotion of 'postcolonialism' co-occured with the migration of scholars from the Global South to institutions in the Global North (see Dirlik, 1994).

[4] In his study of the transnational entanglement of the Cuban and Filipino anti-colonial movements B. Anderson too underlines the importance of global networks of intellectuals (see Anderson, 2007).

[5] The journals 'Small Axe' and 'Caribbean Quarterly' stand out as central institutions of the long and ongoing intellectual history of Caribbean thought, among other examples (see G.K. Lewis, 1983; L.F. Lewis, 2021; Henry, 2000; Meeks & Lindahl, 2001; Bogues, 2003; L.R. Gordon, 2014; Reddock, 2014; Kamugisha, 2019, 2021).

[6] Simultaneously, in London, "the Colonial,Office'[] sense[d a] [...] need for sciences of the social to help in the work of governing the colonialized" and from 1947 until 1949 "the West Indian Social Survey together with faculty members in the Department of Sociology at the London School of Economics" collected sociological and anthropological data in the region (Scott, 2013a, p. 3).

[7] "Writers on the West Indies always relate them to their approximation to Britain, France, Spain and America, that is to say, to Western civilization. Never in relation to their own history. This is here attempted for the first time" (C.L.R. James, 1938).

[8] The importance of a shared regional identity as "a crucial bedrock to anti-imperialism" (Goebel, 2015, p. 130), enabled by exchanges across nationalities (or territories, in the Caribbean case) in the metropole, was similarly observed amongst the Latin American community in interwar Paris by M. Goebel.

[9] This is also supported by L.F. Lewis' work on Wynter: "She came to the realization that the negative image and impressions she developed about Africa and Africans, as opposed to the positive impressions she had toward Europe and Europeans, were all a consequence of her socialization process in the colonial Caribbean" (L.F. Lewis, 2021, p. 140; for the following, see also Cramer, 2022).

[10] A few years after Wynter, further Caribbean social scientists, financed by scholarships, pursued their higher education in London and met and networked with West Indian scholars there. After their return to the British West Indies, these intellectuals shaped the local academic and political sphere. They need, however, to be considered a small elite; meanwhile, many Caribbean students moved to Canada or the US to pursue their higher education (Chowdhury, 2013; Robinson, 2000, p. 260, p. 328). This will not be discussed in this paper (Rodney, 1974, p. 89; xiv; R. Lewis, 1994; see Girvan, 2010, p. 3; Scott, 2013b, p. 242; Austin, 2018, p. 6ff.; Steinmetz, 2019, p. 806ff.).

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